

THE ECONOMIST/on Morocco

King Hassan, who marked his quarter-century on Morocco's throne with a big party early this month, has something better to celebrate. He has recovered the smack of authority and has made friends again with America, which began cold-shouldering him two years ago when he made an alliance with Col. Muammar Qaddafi of Libya.

Morocco's economy is still in a mess, and the costly war in the Western Sahara sputters on. But the three main threats to the king — Islamic fundamentalists, the political left, and ambitious soldiers — all seem to be under control.

Fundamentalism, which helped to set off riots against food-price increases two years ago, has failed to become the menace in Morocco that it is to governments of both the Maghreb's other countries, Algeria and Tunisia.

This is partly because Morocco's Islamic militants have not found a crowd-stirring leader. But even if they had found one, the ruthlessly efficient interior minister, Driss Basri, would probably have kept them on the run.

The sting of the political left has been drawn by its members' participation in Parliament (which, the king has made clear, will continue to exercise only limited powers). Even the Communists and socialists have proved gratifyingly nationalistic over the Western Sahara, which Hassan annexed 11 years ago after Spain left its former colony.

The army, once a ferment of pan-Arab socialists and admirers of Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser, seems smug because of the Western Sahara stalemate. It understandably regards this standoff as a victory over the guerrillas of the Polisario Front. The generals are also enjoying the fruits of a \$1 billion re-equipment program, which began last year. This will put Morocco's army well ahead of that of Algeria, its great

Morocco's surprisingly happy returns

rival in the Maghreb and the supplier of the Polisario's increasingly antiquated Russian weapons.

Hassan can also breathe easier over his country's relations with America. They went sour after the king formed a "political union" with Libya in August 1984. The Americans began to court Algeria as an alternative North African friend. Both Chadli Bendjedid, Algeria's president, and Tunisia's ailing leader, Habib Bourguiba, were received at the White House last year. Hassan was told he would not be welcome. But Chadli Bendjedid, whose professed socialist and non-aligned country always kept its distance

from America, was not much moved by these overtures, and the United States seems to have concluded that Hassan is not so bad after all.

The United States sent a heavyweight delegation to the king's celebration this month. William Casey, head of the CIA, attended; so did Gen. Vernon Walters, America's ambassador to the United Nations. The Americans seem willing to accept that the Libyan tie-up was less of a Qaddafi-booster than they originally feared.

The king argues that the "union" was astute politics: it ended Libya's support for Polisario, and hampered Algeria's attempt to isolate Morocco from the rest of the Maghreb. He also hopes that the deal has given Morocco a badly needed outlet for its exports and a cheap source of oil.

Prepared by the news and feature service of The Economist of London.